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Thomas GRANE

## VARPELEV — CARSIUM — CONSTANTINOPLE. CONTACTS ACROSS BARBARICUM

### Introduction

From the late third century AD, we see a shift in Europe of the political and cultural balance from the West to the East, a shift that is exemplified by the transformation of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great of the Greek city of Byzantium into the Imperial residence of Constantinople in AD 330. This shift is equally visible in the Germanic world, as it is in the Roman Empire.

A key site for the study of this transition is the cemetery of Varpelev on Eastern Zealand traditionally dated to C2 (AD 250/60–310/20). On the one hand, the grave goods from this cemetery show a close relationship to the Germanic power centre of Himlingøje (Lund Hansen et al. 1995). This centre was founded in the middle of the second century AD and lasted until the fourth century. On the other hand, the Varpelev grave goods link to the Germanic warrior elites, as they are represented in graves from the fourth and fifth century AD.

As such, the Varpelev cemetery is exemplary to the transition from the Roman to the Germanic Iron Age and at the same time a link to late Antiquity in a proto-historical part of Europe.

The focus of this paper will mainly be on the chronology of the gravesite and on the supra-regional perspectives of the finds, particularly those that stretch out towards the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

### History of the excavation

The site was discovered in the summer of 1876, when a local farmer started to dig for gravel in the edge of a small natural earthen elevation about 63 x 39m large, on his lands. After hitting the remains of human skeletons and precious objects, the farmer stopped and notified the local pastor. He immediately wrote a letter to the Royal Museum for northern antiquities, later the National Museum of Denmark, listing all that had been found by the farmer. He had stumbled directly into one of the two rich graves, later known as grave *alpha*. For

that reason, Conrad Engelhardt from the Royal Museum hastened to Varpelev, where he excavated four inhumation graves in the southern part of the elevation. At the top of the elevation in the northern part, Engelhardt identified what he believed could be the remaining 45 cm of a mound. A cross-section 1.5 m deep and 2.5 m wide, however, did not reveal anything (Archives). In June 1877, the farmer contacted the museum again. He had continued digging in the southern part and had come across two more skeletons. After this, he had continued on the top of the elevation, presumably where Engelhardt had made his cross-section. There too, the farmer had had to stop, as he had encountered some rather large stones, which he believed could be covering more finds. Engelhardt came back to excavate the rest of the elevation in July and September. Later in 1877, he was able to publish the site in a larger article on inhumation graves on Zealand and in eastern Denmark (Engelhardt 1877). The inference already made by Engelhardt in this article was that this was the burial place of a family's household.

### The gravesite

All in all, the site contained 29 inhumation burials in 27 graves (fig. 1). The majority of the deceased were placed in a crouched position with the heads towards north to northeast. This was the normal custom for low profile graves on Zealand. Only some of these graves were equipped with any grave goods. They bodies had been placed directly on the gravel in a depth of about 1.2 m. One of the deceased (grave *r*) had a fractured skull, most likely from sword cuts. Four of the graves had received extra attention in the burial process regarding the position of the body and the gifts in the graves. One grave (*alpha*) had already been disturbed by the initial gravel digging, but two large stones and the numerous high status objects that were found in connection with this grave gave a strong indication that it had been a high profile grave. In the three remaining graves, the deceased had been laid

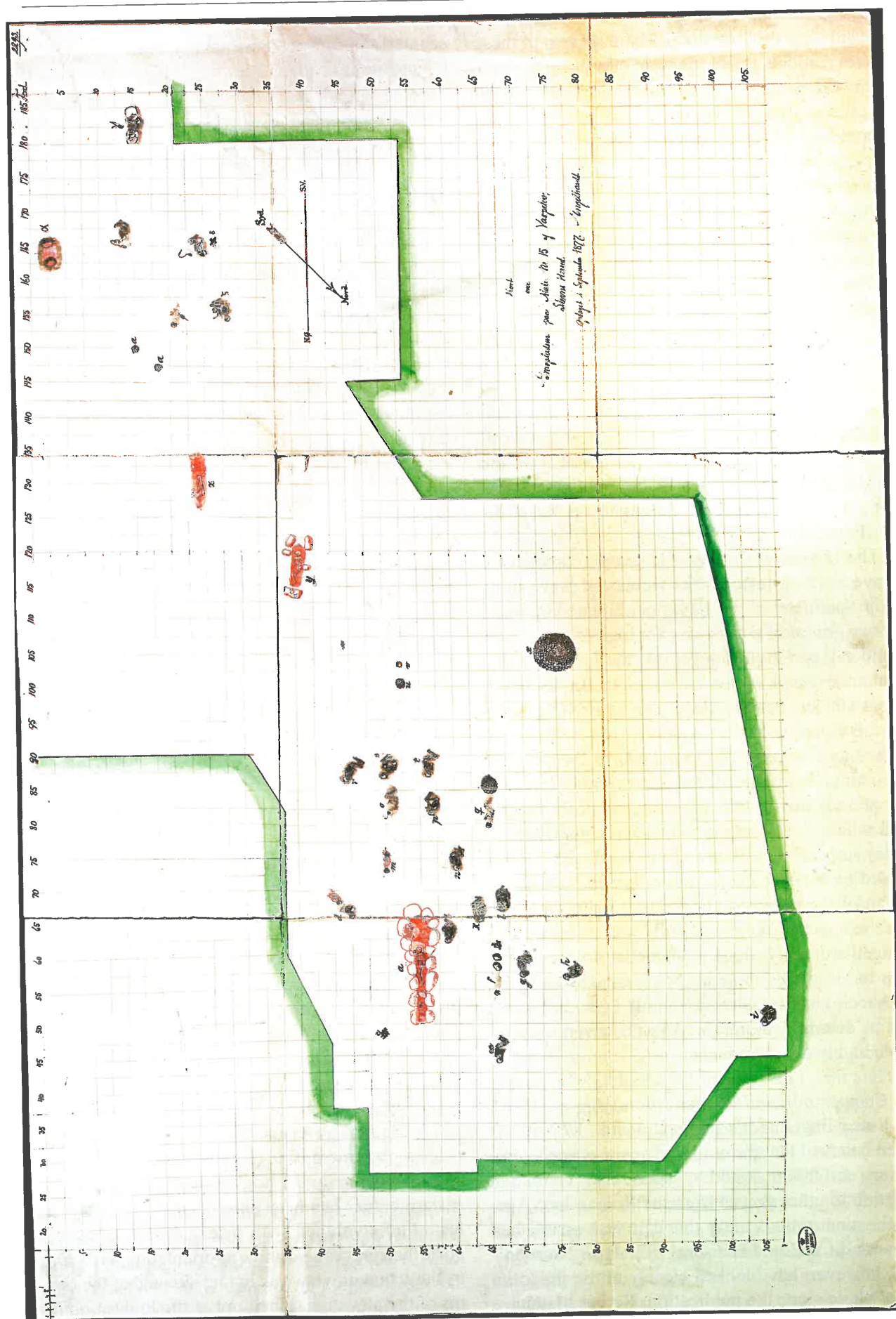


Fig. 1. Final plan of the gravesite (National Museum Archives, Copenhagen; drawing: Julius Magnus Petersen)

to rest on their backs with the head resting on the right side and the legs slightly bent. In two of these (graves *a* and *z*), the heads were orientated towards southwest, while the third (grave *y*) had been placed in a more westerly direction. On Zealand, it was the custom for high status graves to be orientated more or less towards south. Grave *a* was discovered in a preserved depth of 2.3 m, while grave *y* and *z* were found in a depth of 2 m. Of these four, graves *y* and *z* were equipped with a few grave goods, while graves *a* and *alpha* were very richly equipped.

The gravesite also contained one urn grave, which Engelhardt did not believe belonged to the Iron Age based on the type of vessel (Engelhardt 1877: 363). Unfortunately, this vessel does no longer exist.

A majority of the low profile graves were situated quite closely immediately south and west of grave *a* on the northern half of the natural elevation (fig. 1). Engelhardt writes in his publication that this grave was situated on the highest point of the hill (Engelhardt 1877: 350).

The remaining low profile graves, except one (grave *i*) were situated in the vicinity of grave *alpha* in the south end of the elevation. Situated between the two groups of graves were the high profile graves *y* and *z*. Apart from the graves, the gravesite also contained a cooking pit 2m wide and 1m deep with about 100 smaller and closely set stones (fig. 1. x). Furthermore, there were a number of small piles of stones near several of the graves. In the publication, Engelhardt stated that the gravesite had not been excavated in full, but what he meant exactly and where the gravesite would have continued is today impossible to know (Engelhardt 1877: 349). Based on the size of the gravesite and the composition of the deceased, Engelhardt believed that it had belonged to a noble family and its household (Engelhardt 1877: 350). The gender determination was based partly on anthropological and partly on archaeological remains. All in all 11 bodies could not be determined, nine were male, seven were female and two were infants.

#### *Composition and relative chronology*

Since Engelhardt's publication in 1877, it has been believed that the entire gravesite was contemporary and that it should be dated relatively late in relation to other graves from the Roman Iron Age. In the nineteenth century this date was established as period C2 (Lund Hansen 1987: 416). No scholars, however, have looked closely at the gravesite as a whole since the publication. Rather they have

drawn out different object groups for different scholarly purposes. If we take another look at the composition of the graves, it is clear that graves *y* and *z* are situated on the central part of the elevation. They are also the only graves, which have no other graves in their immediate vicinity. Furthermore, these two graves are high profile graves, but with limited grave goods, unlike graves *a* and *alpha*.

#### *Grave y*

The deceased, a male, was meticulously placed on a thin layer of clay, and the body had also been packed with clay and fine sand (Engelhardt 1877: 363–364, fig. 17) (fig. 2). A number of larger stones were placed around the grave. Under the largest of the stones below the feet were found a three layered bone comb with iron rivets (Fig. 3) dated by Jørgen Ilkjær loosely to period C (Ilkjær 1993a: 309; 1993b: 489, list 45a), and a clay vessel with

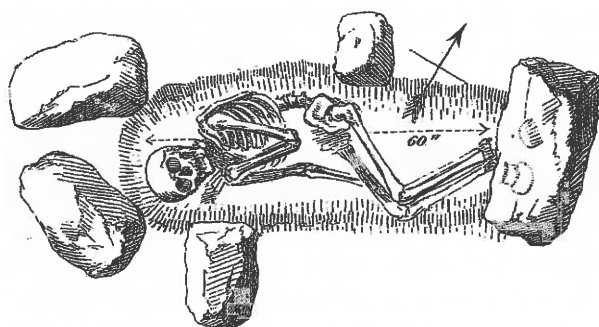


Fig. 2. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave *y*  
(Engelhardt 1877: 24, fig. 17)

a high neck and ornamentation. Unfortunately, the clay vessel is lost today. The fact that the grave goods were found under the stone and the general placement of the stones around the grave indicates that they may have had the function of weighing down wooden boards covering the grave. Based on the central position of the grave and the lack of graves close by, this grave may have been marked in some way by a row of stones on the surface or even a small barrow.

At the beginning of the summer campaign of 1877, Magnus Petersen, the museum's illustrator, made a plan and profile drawing of the elevation at a time, when only the northern part and the south-eastern corner had been excavated (fig. 4). This illustration combined with the final plan using the unearthed graves *zeta* and *a* as orientation will serve to show that grave *y* was in fact situated at the centre of the elevation, albeit not at the highest point,



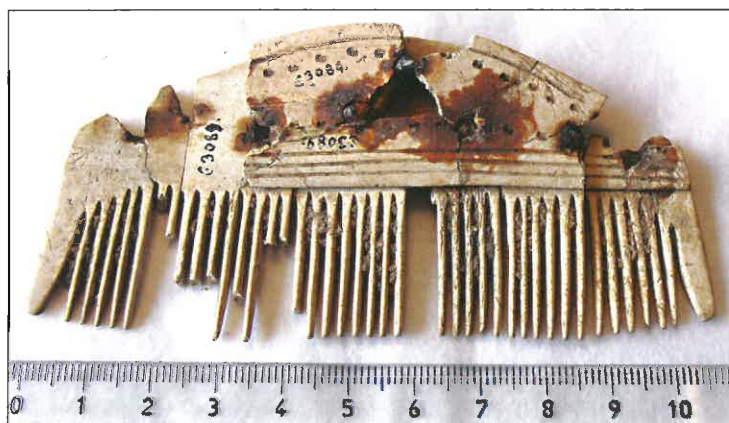


Fig. 3. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave *y*.  
Three layered bone comb with bronze rivets.  
Dimensions: 9.9 x 10 cm  
(National Museum, Copenhagen; photo: the author)

in as much as we can trust the accuracy of Magnus Petersen's drawings (fig. 5). Closer scrutiny of the two plans will show some discrepancies, but regarding the placement of grave *y*, it is acceptable. Engelhardt writes that according to local rumours there used to be a barrow on top of the elevation. Certainly, considering Engelhardt's trial section of 1876 mentioned above, he thought it would have been in the northern part, which actually turned out to be more or less on top of grave *a*, which does give his thoughts some credibility. Another possibility is that it marked a founder's grave at the centre of the hill. A possible demarcation with a diameter of 12 to 15 metres would provide ample space for a small barrow. That would also mean that grave *z* must have been a burial secondary to *y*, placed near the edge of the demarcation of grave *y*. It should be noted though, that also grave *z* is without close graves, so the same argument could be made for this grave, except for the fact that it was not situated in the centre of the elevation. For that reason it is my hypothesis that grave *y* should be considered the earliest central grave.

#### *Grave z*

The deceased in grave *z* had been placed on a thin layer of sand (Engelhardt 1877: 364, fig. 20) (fig. 6). The gender was archaeologically determined to be a woman based on a necklace containing at least 44 plain turned amber beads. Next to the body was a bronze fibula of type Almgren VII, series 3, variation 205 with tremolo ornamentation on the loop in a zigzag pattern (fig. 7). A small clay vessel and some iron are no longer preserved. A compartment at the head end dug into the gravel

contained two handled clay vessels containing animal bones. The fibula, as the only datable object, places this grave in period C1b2 (Ethelberg 2009: 17–23). If we follow the logic of this hypothesis, the central grave *y* must pre-date grave *z* providing us with a rough date of that grave and the beginning of the burial place to within C1, but C1b2 at the latest provided that the two graves could be almost contemporary. As was the case with the physical requirements for the graves, i. e. the space around them, the datable material does not, however, speak against the opposite, that grave *y* could be younger than grave *z* and most probably C1b. Therefore, the hypothesis that grave *y* is older than grave *z* rests solely on the central position of grave *y*. Based

on this, I will cautiously date the central grave to period C1b.

#### *Graves a and alpha*

The two remaining high profile graves were placed each in one end of the elevation, grave *alpha* to the south and grave *a* to the north. If there was a specific reason for that, it naturally eludes us. As mentioned, Engelhardt believed that there might have been a barrow on the north part of the elevation. After discovering grave *a*, which was the most elaborate grave by far, it is very likely that he felt confirmed in this belief. The problem is that the space around grave *a*, at least on the southern, western and northern sides, was densely occupied by low profile graves. For grave *alpha* the situation is more or less the same, although the surrounding area was less densely occupied. There is a potential problem in the fact that we have no datable material regarding the low profile graves, but they are assumed to be contemporary with the high profile graves. As we are no longer viewing the whole gravesite as contemporary, this assumption needs to be more closely defined. The low profile graves form two groups. The southern group contained six graves, of which one belonged to an infant and the rest were undefined adults. The northern group including two double graves contained 15 graves, of which one belonged to an infant, five were female and seven were male. Five were undefined. It does seem logical to infer, as did Engelhardt (1877: 350), that we are dealing with a family and its household. The two groups can be seen as linked to the two rich high profile graves. Particularly grave *a* is surrounded very closely by graves. One grave (*b*) is

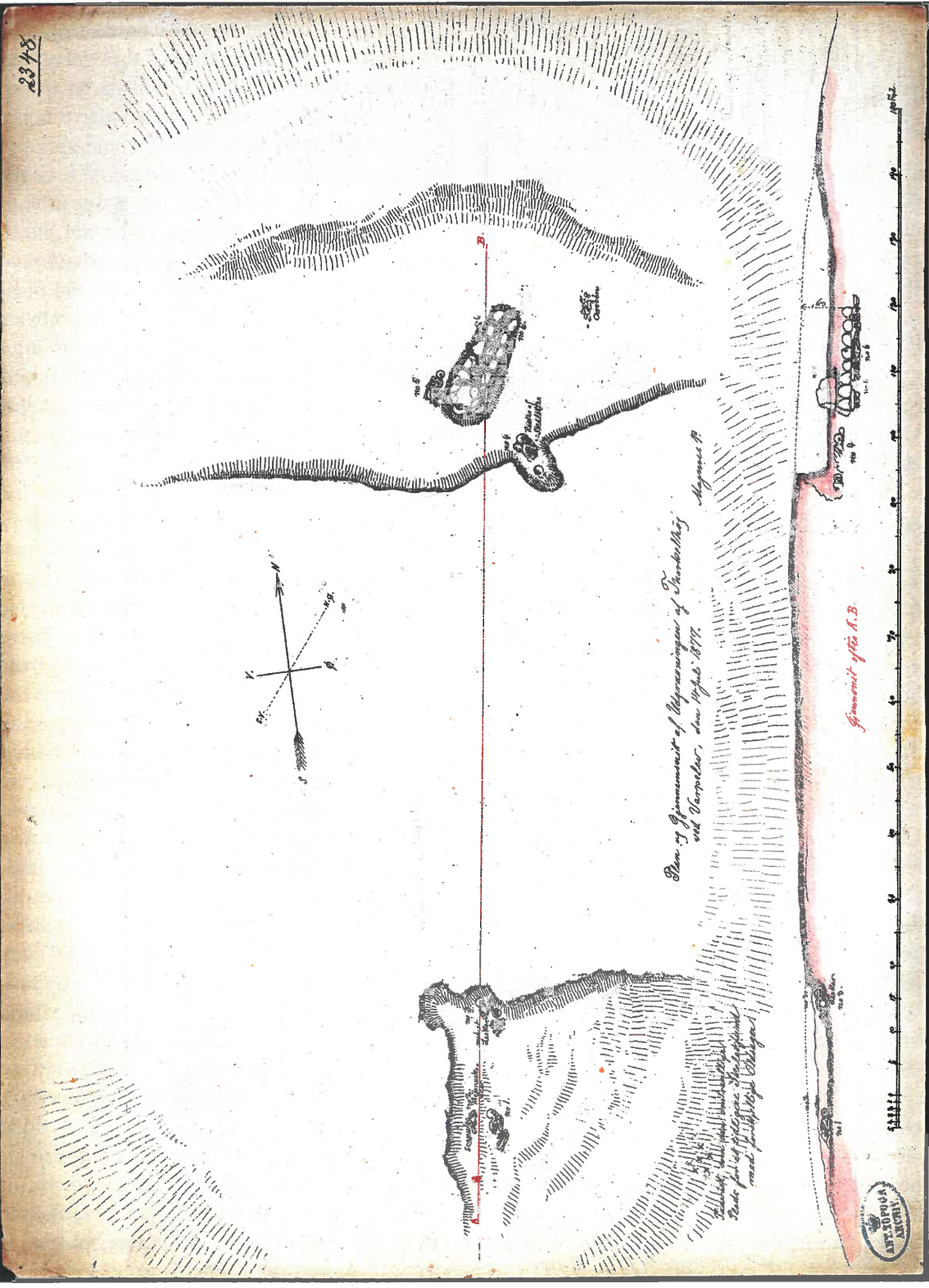


Fig. 4. Plan and profile of the elevation, drawn on July the 14th (National Museum Archives, Copenhagen; drawing: Julius Magnus Petersen)





Fig. 5. Combination of figures 1 and 4 showing the position of grave  $\gamma$  in relation to graves zeta and  $\alpha$ .  
Blue lines: high profile graves; blue ring: possible demarcation of central grave

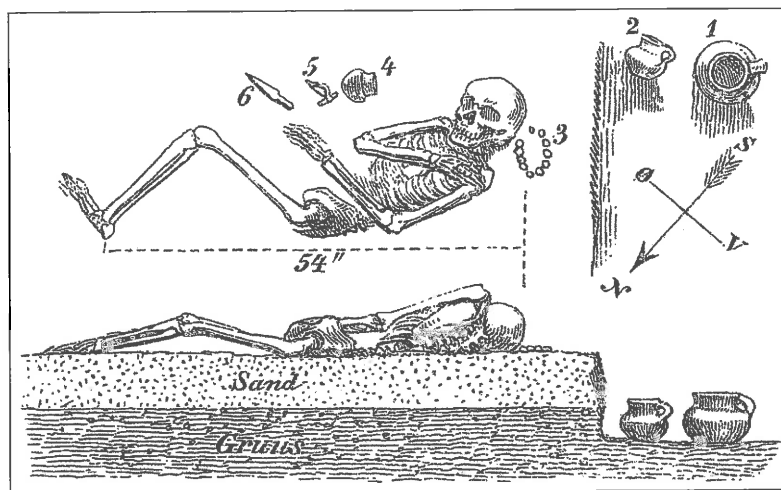


Fig. 6. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave z (Engelhardt 1877: 365, fig. 20)

practically on top of grave *a* (fig. 11). It belonged to a small but strong woman according to the anthropological material (Engelhardt 1877: 359). At the neck, Engelhardt found a piece of iron, 3.4 cm long, which he thought might have come from a neck ring. That piece of iron, which is no longer preserved, led to an idea that this woman might have been a personal slave to the person buried in grave *a*. This may very well have been the case,

but it is perhaps more probable that the piece of iron belonged to a fibula rather than an eighteenth century style slave ring. Unfortunately, the iron fragment is not preserved.

All in all, the closeness and orientation towards the two high profile graves allows for the inference that the low profile graves are more or less contemporary with them, and at least later. On the other hand, this makes it very unlikely that grave *a* had been marked with a barrow, as that would have left an empty space around the grave, such as was visible by the recent discovery in 2007 at Ellekilde on Zealand of a gravesite with 30 graves surrounding a

founding grave leaving room for a barrow (Iversen 2011: 73–74). An interesting fact is that, if the graves were marked on the surface, all the high profile graves would have been visible from the eastern side of the elevation. Whether that is significant is, of course, impossible to know, but it could indicate that the undiscovered settlement related to the gravesite should be found in that direction. Regarding other high profile graves in the region such as Valløby, Himlingøje and Varpelev Sb. 6, situated just 1.5 km west of the Varpelev Sb. 8 gravesite, visibility appears to have mattered a great deal.

### The rich graves

Now, let us turn to the contents of the two richly equipped graves. I have on previous occasions talked about these two graves as closely connected, suggesting that we may have to revise their dating (Grane 2011: 108). In the publication, Engelhardt decided to name the two graves *a* and *alpha*. This may have made sense to him, when he was preparing the manuscript, but in retrospect it was not one of his brighter moments, as it has led to some confusion concerning the origin of different objects. As mentioned, since the publication in 1877, nobody has worried much about the site as a whole, whereas the individual objects and object groups have received some attention over the years in connection with various examinations and analyses. Based on these studies, the two graves have been dated to period C2 and with them, the entire grave site. A few attempts to replace particularly grave *a* in the chronological context have been rejected, among other things due to methodological errors (Lund Hansen 1987: 41). However, closer examination shows that such a narrow dating is questionable.



Fig. 7. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave z. Bronze fibula, type Almgren VII, series 3, variation 205.

Dimensions: 3.1 x 2.6 cm

(National Museum, Copenhagen; photo: the author)



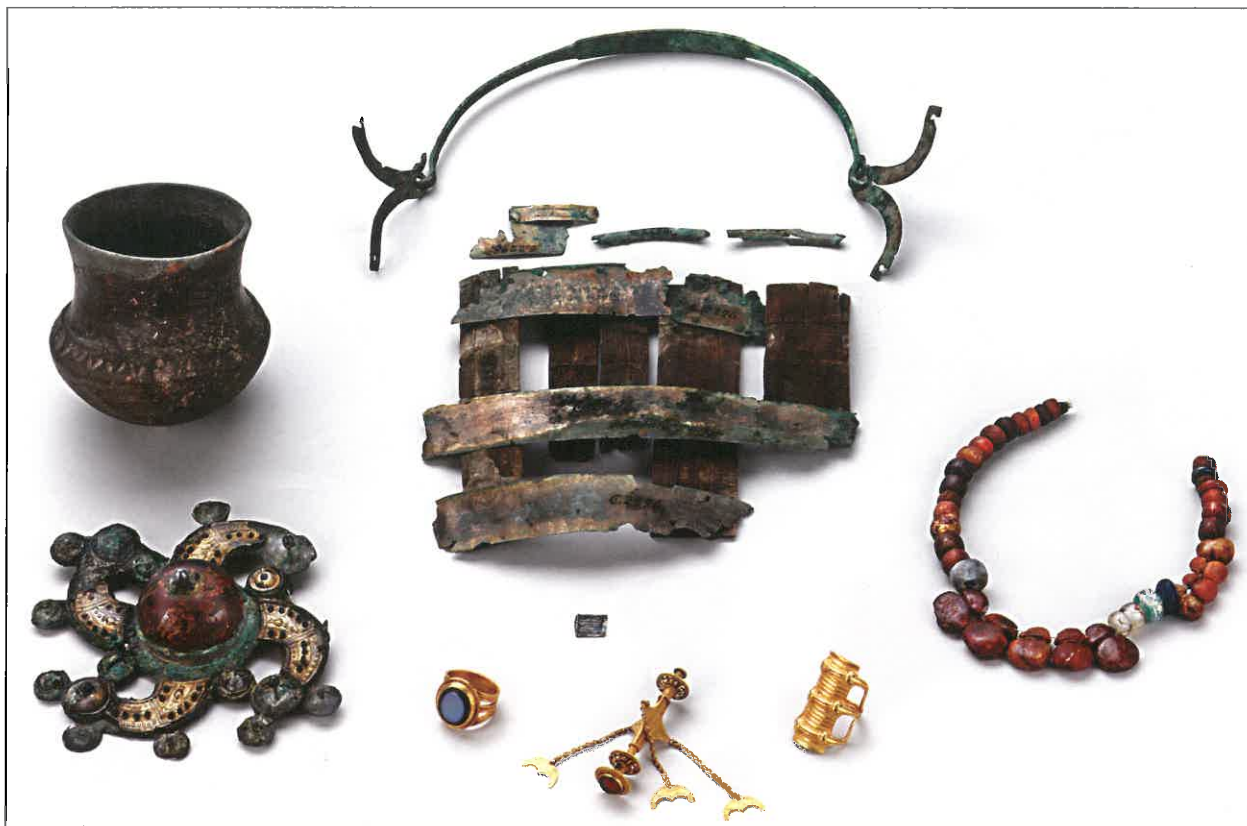


Fig. 8. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave *alpha* (National Museum, Copenhagen; photo: John Lee)

#### Grave *alpha*

We know little about the context of grave *alpha* as this grave was disturbed. All we know is that two large stones were involved. The gender of the deceased in grave *alpha* was determined archaeologically to be female. This was based on the fact that a large part of the preserved grave goods were jewellery (Engelhardt 1877: 366–367) (fig. 8). Thus, there was a magnificent silver swastika fibula with a large amber disc in the middle and decorated with pressed gold sheet, particularly in the form of small birds. This piece has recently been placed in period C3 by Marzena Przybyła in her work on the magnificent fibulae (Przybyła 2009: 50).

The gold objects consisted of two fingerings and an elaborate silver pin with a gold head.

One ring is a so-called snake's head ring type Beckmann 39c. This type has been very closely connected to the theories concerning status levels of the Himlingøje dynasty. 28 examples of the Beckmann 39c ring are found, of which four were found in Norway and five in Sweden. The remaining 19 are all from Denmark. As is the case with most types of gold rings from the Roman Iron

Age only a few were found in a datable context. Thus, five graves in Denmark and one in Norway contained a gold ring type Beckmann 39c. These graves have been dated to periods C1–2 (Ethelberg 2009: 146–152; Kibernich 1995: 115–120). The fact that the ring is rather small compared to other rings of the same type, has led Lisbeth Kibernich to



Fig. 9. Gold hair pins with pelta-shaped pendants.  
Left: Varpelev grave *alpha*. Length: 6 cm.

Right: Årslev  
(National Museum, Copenhagen; photo: John Lee)



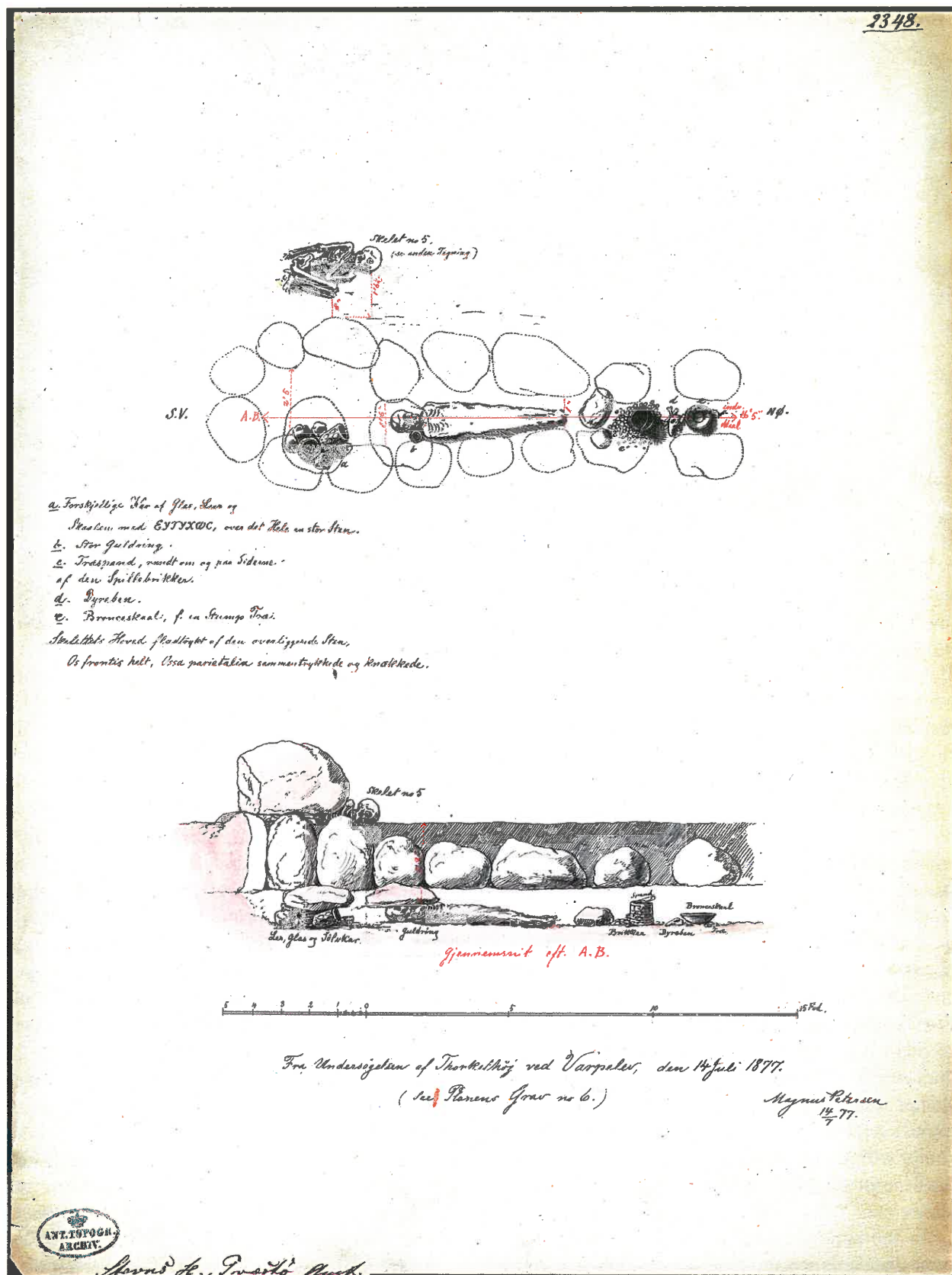


Fig. 11. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave a, plan of the grave  
(National Museum Archives, Copenhagen; drawing: Julius Magnus Petersen)



to and C3 (Storgaard 1990: 49; Ethelberg 2011: 114–115). Mogens Bo Henriksen in his analysis of the gold hoard from Brangstrup refers to both Årslev and Varpelev as parallels to some of the pelta-shaped pendants in the hoard (Henriksen 1992: 50–55). The Brangstrup hoard, which has parallels in the south eastern part of Europe, has a *terminus post quem* of AD 335–337 due to the youngest Roman coins in the hoard. The conclusion is that the pins from both Varpelev and Årslev may very well be highly elaborate works of local craftsmen, but with elements from the Southeast in the form of pelta shaped pendants.

#### Grave a

Let us now turn to grave *a*, which has by far the most spectacular grave ensemble (Engelhardt 1877: 350–359) (fig. 10). The deceased was laid to rest on his back at least 3 metres below ground level in a “stone coffin” so to speak, consisting of 16 large natural stones, creating a chamber of 5.3 x 1.80 m (fig. 11). Most of the skeleton had dissolved, but based on an examination of the thigh and arm bones, the deceased was determined as a heavy limbed, strongly developed male (Engelhardt 1877: 352, note 1). The body was situated in the middle with room for grave goods both above his head and beneath his feet. The space between the individual stones surrounding the grave had been closed with clay, forming an actual chamber, a sarcophagus, so to speak.

The foot end of the grave had been covered with a layer of small stones. Furthest north on this layer stood a Roman bronze basin type Eggers 105 with parallels in Årslev and Søndre Kjørstad that had been placed on top of a wooden bowl containing bones of a pig. Inside the basin was a three layered bone comb datable to C2 (Ilkjær 1993b: 490, list 45a). Everything had been covered with some kind of textile. Next to the basin was a large wooden bucket with bronze fittings. Both inside and outside of the bucket, 42 gaming pieces of bone were found; some of these also under the flat stone together with some animal bones. Between the feet of the deceased were found the remains of four bear’s claws.

In the southern end of the grave, a large flat stone had crushed most of at least six glass vessels and one ceramic vessel, as well as a horn with silver fittings. Of the six glass vessels, a number of fragments belong to one possibly two ordinary faceted glass vessels type Eggers 230. The remaining four vessels are all unique.

The green faceted glass has a height of 18 cm. It has five rows of ovals and a double concave rim. There is today, some uncertainty concerning the origin of the faceted glasses, as some are believed to be of a Gothic Black Sea origin, while others are thought to be Roman. According to Ulla Lund Hansen, the very high quality of craftsmanship applied to this piece indicates an origin in a workshop in the region of Constantinople. A major problem has been finding parallels.

The only vessel with resembling elements comes from the incredibly rich second grave from Apahida near Cluj in Romania (Goldhelm 1994: 249, no. 101.35). This grave is dated to the middle or second half of the fifth century, but the glass is likely to have been an antique, as it has been repaired with gold foil. The glass is 16 cm high and has three rows of somewhat larger ovals with a small spacing in between. Particularly the double concave rim is alike on the two glasses. An interesting parallel to the Apahida piece comes from the unpublished necropolis of Carsium, a Roman city on the Danube near the Black Sea. Like the one from Varpelev, it is 18 cm high (Moderán 2008: 149, cat. no. 663). The faceted area is very similar to the Apahida piece, although the spacing is a little different. Below the rim, there is a zone with a Greek inscription, “ΤΙΙΕ ΖΗΚΑΙΚ ΕΝ ΑΓΑΘΟΙΚ” meaning “*Drink and You shall live among the Good.*” This is clearly a vessel originating in the Roman empire. The combined evidence from these three glasses supports the assumption made by Ulla Lund Hansen regarding an origin of the Varpelev glass in the region of Constantinople or the eastern Roman provinces. In late Antiquity, this, and other similar inscriptions are used in gold decorations of the bottom of glass vessels especially by the Christian community, who, for instance, used these gold decorated bottoms to mark and personalize cells in the Catacombs.

The highlight of the grave goods is without a doubt a *kantharos* made of blue glass blown into an openwork silver frame decorated with wine leaves and the Greek inscription “εὐτυχία” meaning “*For your happiness*” (fig. 12). According to Susanna Künzl, this work is probably of a Syrian or at least an east Roman origin (Künzl 2000a: 76; 2000b: 614).

There are a couple of parallels to the technique, although not to the motif. The closest parallel is dark red and comes from Georgia, now at the Ermitage in Saint Petersburg (Birjukowa 1986: no. 6).



Fig. 12. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave *a*. Detail of Greek openwork inscription “εὐτυχῶς” meaning “For your happiness” on silver/glass *kantharos* (National Museum, Copenhagen; photo: the author)

Künzl also established that the Varpelev *kantharos* had been repaired. Thus the top plate that served as a thumb handle did not belong originally. Parallels to the top plate have been found in Georgia (Künzl 2000a: 76). Furthermore, the index finger rings had been substituted by the middle finger supports for some reason. Apparently, Künzl did not realize that the two substituted rings were in fact part of the grave goods. This indicates two things. First of all, that this vessel had been used regularly; secondly, that the vessel was sufficiently important for the two rings to have survived to be put in the grave. What then, could be the reason for the alteration? Well, a look at the measures of the rings, show an internal diameter of 15–17 mm. The altered handles of the *kantharos* have an internal diameter of 21–22 mm, corresponding with the two gold fingerings that were also found in grave *a*.

The most enigmatic of the glass vessels, has for long been considered a pipette of sorts as it is open in both ends. We actually know of Roman glass pipettes, but they are much more delicate, why such a use is highly unlikely. The closest we can come to

this shape, are unguent containers belonging to the fourth and fifth century, but they are always closed in one end, and in some cases they have even been closed in the other end after the filling of perfumed oil. This type of vessel is solely found in mortuary contexts, and often with a glass vessel with an inscription. This has led Hillary Cool to suggest that they belong to some ritual to do with religions believing in an afterlife such as the Bacchus cult or Christianity (Cool 2002). She has suggested that the Varpelev example must have been specially made, as she has seen nothing like it. That means that the container would have had to be sealed in both ends. It is not entirely obvious that it is this type of container, but the combination with a vessel with an inscription at least allows for such a scenario.

On his right hand's thumb and ring finger, he had two rather common gold rings. At his right shoulder there was a small gold pin. A snake's head arm ring type C was located near the neck. This type is considered by Per Ethelberg to originate in Central Sweden due to the resemblance

with snake's head fingerings type 40, which are mainly distributed in Sweden and Norway, while only a few are found in Denmark (Ethelberg 2011: 115). These rings, however, show great variety in form. Furthermore, only a few are actually found in a context. Kent Andersson, on the other hand, believes that this type is produced locally based on his examination of workshops in Scandinavia, something that he underlines using precisely the Varpelev ring (Andersson 1995). On the right side of the head there was an *aureus* from Emperor Probus, who reigned from AD 276 to 282, equipped with a rather crude loop. I have on previous occasions used among other things this coin to present a scenario, which mirrored the presence of *aurei* from the Gallic emperors in graves from the Haßleben-Leuna region, that is, that we may see an attempt to reinstate conditions regarding rela-

tions to the Romans as they were before the crisis in the 260s–270s (Grane 2007, 276). This coin can only provide us with a *terminus post quem* of the early 280s.

At the waist, there was a silver belt buckle with a strap end fitting and a couple of smaller fittings. The loop is decorated with a cell pattern and the tongue with an animal's head (fig. 13). The rivets are also decorated. The buckle is a late Roman military belt type. Late Roman military belts are found in most of the Roman provinces, especially Gaul and Pannonia and belong to the fourth and fifth century.

The Varpelev belt belongs in Markus Sommer's group A1a and Erwin Keller's A–B–C buckles. This type is dated to AD 290 to 400 for the Danube region by Sommer and more narrowly to 330 to 360 by Keller (Keller 1971: 58; Sommer

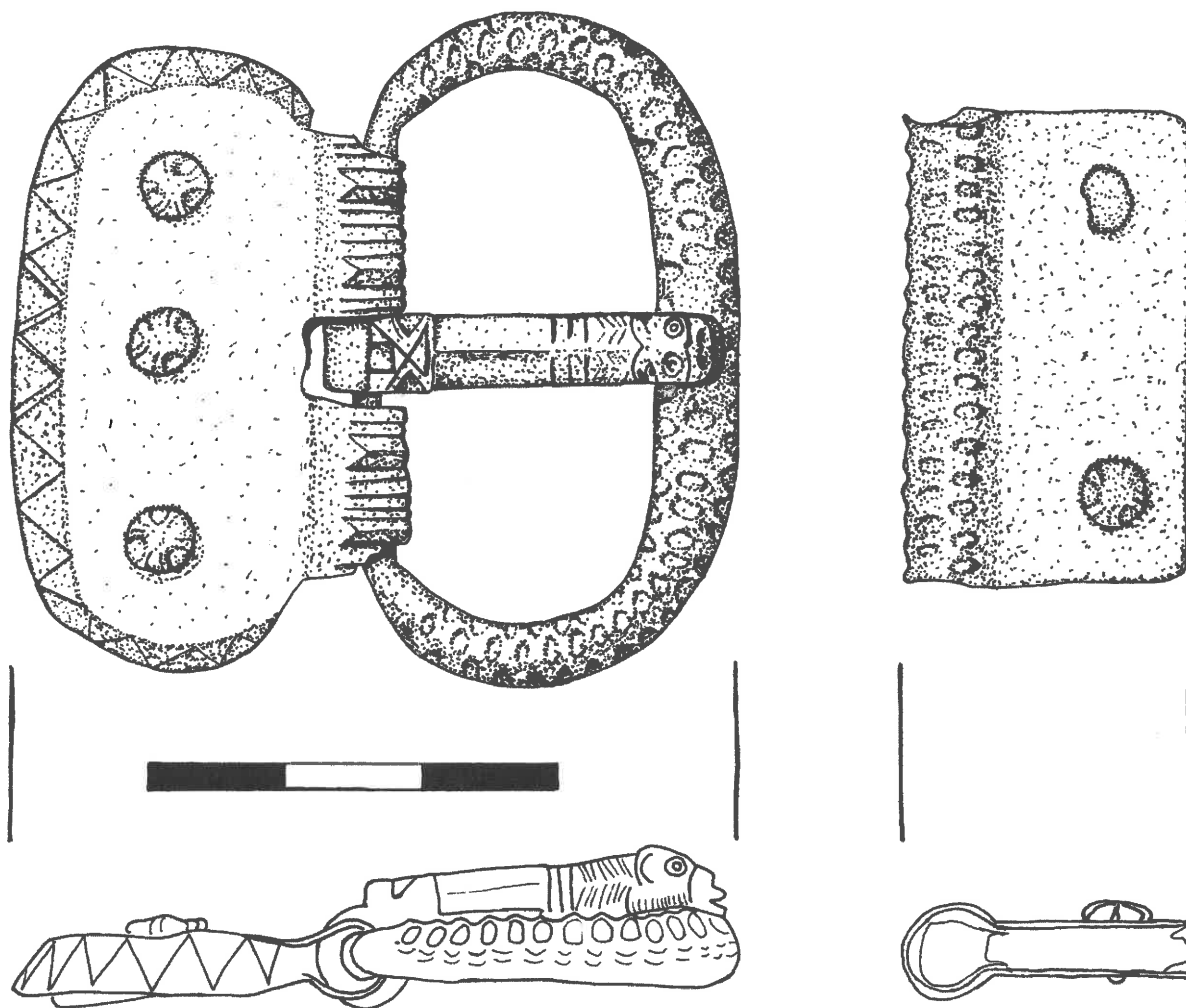


Fig. 13. Varpelev Sb. 8, grave a. Silver belt buckle and strap end. Dimensions: loop — 4.5 x 3 cm; plate — 4.5 x 2.8 cm; pin — 2.9 x 0.5 x 0.4 cm; strap-end — 3.4 x 2.1 cm.  
(National Museum, Copenhagen; drawing: the author)



1984: 74–75). The strap end is decorated similarly, but the cells appear less elaborate, indicating that it may not have been made by the same or at the same time as the buckle. As the cell ornamentation is practically unknown on Roman, or other belts for that matter, several scholars have considered the belt a Germanic copy rather than a Roman belt. Michel Kazanski considered this belt in an article in the conference publication of Inter Ambo Maria from 2011, where he demonstrates a relation of the Varpelev belt and other artefacts with cell ornamentation to a Roman tradition, arguing that the belt had been produced in a Roman workshop and most likely under orders by Barbarian chiefs (Kazanski 2011).

As is the case with the other unique objects in this grave, it is extremely difficult to find good parallels. Some examples have been suggested to me by colleagues coming from as different places as Krefeld-Gellep on the Rhine, Pruszcz Gdąński in Poland, Zhitomir in Russia, Augsburg in Germany and Spanțov and Hârșova in Romania. On a general level, all these buckles, and in fact many others on both sides of the Roman frontier have a slight likeness to the Varpelev example. But most of them only have a superficial resemblance, when it comes to possible inspiration and origin. In fact only the belt buckles from Zhitomir (Kazanski 2011: 98, fig. 5. 5) and Spanțov (Mitrea, Preda 1966: 20, 207, fig. 10. 3) (fig. 14) are good parallels to the main buckle. The loops on both are made with cell ornamentation like the one from Varpelev, although they have respectively more and fewer lines of cells. It is therefore, quite clear that the search for parallels should focus on details rather than entire buckles.

For the best detail parallels we have to look closer at a number of belt buckles and fittings from the unpublished Roman necropolis of Carsium, present day Hârșova (Goldhelm 1994: 225, no. 94; Moderán 2008: 149, cat. nos. 642–648, 650–656). These fittings have been dated to AD 320 based on coins found in a purse with the deceased (Kazanski 2011: 95, note 3). If we compare the different elements, there are a lot of resemblances. The loops of the main buckles have the same dimensions, although the Carsium example is ornamented with animal's heads, probably wild boars. The elements of the tongue are identical with a triangular cross section. At the hinge it has a rectangular or square part to block the plate, and the point is shaped as an animal's head.

Some of these features are the same on some of the smaller buckles. The shape of these is much similar to the small Varpelev buckle, although it has only one rivet, something that Kazanski (2011, 96) points out as well. The hinge ornamentation on one of the small buckles consists of two lines parted by a “roof-shaped” zone, something that is also hinted at on three of the smaller fittings, which, along with an undecorated piece, have the exact same shape as the small fitting from Varpelev (Kazanski 2011: 94, fig. 3. 1–5). And last but not least, the strap-end is equipped with three clover-shaped rivets that could be construed as inspirational to the rivets from Varpelev. In general, no late Roman belts with decorated rivets have come to my attention, except this. The fact that the parts are made of silver, only enhances the impression. I have, therefore, reached the same conclusion as Kazanski that the Varpelev belt was made to order by craftsmen inside the Roman Empire, most likely in the eastern Danube region (Grane 2013: 191).

#### The dating of the gravesite

I have here attempted to present the gravesite of Varpelev Sb. 8 in a way that makes it clear that it is a much more complex site than has been presented before. It is possible to see a development in the gravesite from one central founding grave (γ) in the centre of a natural elevation. The care that was shown in the burial practice indicates that this person was important to the local community, a part of the nobility. It does not appear



Fig. 14. Spanțov, grave 4. Bronze belt buckle.

Dimensions: 3.3 x 1.9 cm

(National Muzeum of Romanian History, inv. no. 17099;  
photo: the author)

to have been a rich community or nobility judging by the grave goods in the early graves. The male deceased in grave *y* was probably followed by the female in grave *z* not to long after. Grave *z* belongs in the period C1b2, that is, around the middle of the third century. When the next high profile grave was being prepared, the situation had changed. That much we can assume from the wealth of both graves *alpha* and *a*. Several objects from both of these graves point towards a date in the fourth century, and most likely in period C3 rather than the end of C2. On the one hand, recent work on the swastika fibulae by Marzena Przybyła supports a C3 date for grave *alpha*. Also the pelta shaped pendants point towards the fourth century. Lisbeth Kibernich has argued that the snake's-head fingering from this grave was exceptional compared to other Beckmann 39c rings because it was custom-made. Kazanski already demonstrated how the belt parts in grave *a* belong in C3, but the rest of the precious objects cannot help us with the dating, although the *aureus* from AD 276–82 also indicates a later date according to Helle Horsnæs (2010: 60). Per Ethelberg argues strongly for a C2 date for both graves. Some important reasons given by Ethelberg are, first of all, that the snake's head rings would then last longer than the rich graves at Himlingøje. As this type of ring is strongly connected with the sphere of interest of the Himlingøje dynasty, the ring could not exist after the demise of that dynasty. Furthermore, he argues that despite Przybyła's research, four-armed swastika fibulae such as the example from grave *alpha* are only dated to C2. Thirdly, he argues that there was a discontinuity on Zealand between C2 and C3, that is, rich graves from C3 are never found at the same sites as rich graves from C2 (Ethelberg 2011: 114–115). It is quite clear that based on these points it is impossible to date the Varpelev graves to C3 instead of C2. Lastly, Ethelberg believes that the gold arm ring from grave *a* was produced in middle Sweden and therefore not part of the group of Himlingøje insignia that are normally known as the snake's head rings. Therefore, he suggests the possibility of a power coming down from Sweden to take hold at Varpelev, because "*this would explain, why Himlingøje ended abruptly during the course of C2, why a Swedish arm ring was found in Varpelev... and why there is a discontinuity in the rich grave environments between C2 and C3*" (Ethelberg 2011: 115). This development is construed differently by Ulla Lund Hansen,

who saw Varpelev as the natural continuation of Himlingøje (Lund Hansen et al. 1995: 392, 430). Furthermore, the so-called demise of the high profile graves may have something to do with a change in grave customs and rituals. In fact, "*it is worth noting that in the Eastern Zealand/Stevns area it is possible to observe continuity in the rich finds, despite the changed depositional practices in the transition from the Late Roman to the Early Germanic Iron Age*" (Lund Hansen 2001: 227). This is not supporting a sudden demise of Himlingøje. Quite clearly, the situation in the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century is nothing if not complicated. In fact, the transition from C2 to C3 may stand considerably clearer in our archaeological chronology systems, than it did for members of the Iron Age societies of that time. Ethelberg's arguments primarily fit into artificially created boxes, into which we need to put the different items in order to sort them out. The problems arise, like in the case of the rich Varpelev graves, when the finds defy the boxes. As mentioned above, Kent Andersson has argued that the snake's head arm rings were made by different craftsmen in different regions using the ring from Varpelev as his prime example (Andersson 1995). Ethelberg compares the arm ring type C with the fingering type 40, which is mainly found in middle Sweden (Ethelberg 2000). The problem is that only six examples are found and none of these are in a context. Therefore, Andersson's conclusion is preferable. Ethelberg's other arguments are expressing a need to keep things within the given rules, but the statistical material is far too little to claim that a swastika fibula has to have a fifth arm in C3. While we may be content at the time with suggesting that the fibula is drawing grave *alpha* towards the C2/C3 transition, the Late Roman military belt is placing grave *a* in the first half of C3.

### Conclusion

The overall conclusion to the question of chronology must be that what we see in Varpelev is a gravesite, which is initiated probably in the middle of C1b by the burial of a member of the local nobility, someone, whose status perhaps does not allow for valuable gifts like his contemporaries at nearby Himlingøje, but someone who is still worthy of a burrow or demarcation. For several generations the head of the family is given the proper ceremony. At the same time, during C2, status is slowly acquired in the region with connections to an over re-

gional power. It all ends sometime in the end of the first half of C3 corresponding to the Constantinian era with the burial of a man, who had obtained the highest rank through his commitment in Roman-Germanic affairs.

A large part of the grave goods in both rich graves underline an increasing contact to the eastern parts of the Empire. Whereas the rich graves of the Himlingøje gravesite revealed unique, but generally anonymous objects befitting certain demands or rituals, which involved feasting and involving drinking vessels, containers and ladles, it is quite clear that the Roman objects of particularly grave *a* represented a different kind of contact. While the earlier graves represented a long distance relationship, grave *a* is evidence of a close encounter. As mentioned above, there is a large number of unique objects that link to the eastern parts of the Roman empire; a military belt with links to the Danube

provinces and glass vessels pointing in the same direction; a very used and repaired drinking vessel with a Greek inscription; gold jewellery that reflect the highest power in the society. All this suggests that this person unlike his predecessors had to be outgoing in order to preserve his position in the society. That brought him particularly to the eastern provinces of the Roman empire, from where he brought back highly personalized items that required a personal knowledge of Roman customs. This may have been in corporation with or in spite of regional powers, perhaps to regain a lost position. Such an action would have required an active foreign policy, as it would have been clear to the Zealandic élite that their former position was gone for good with the crisis and the coming of the tetrarchy, when a new policy regarding the Germanic tribes was instigated rendering former alliances useless.

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Томас ГРАНЕ

Варпелев — Карс — Константинополь.

Контакты через Барбарикум

Резюме

Начиная с конца III в. в Европе наблюдается сдвиг политического и культурного баланса с Запада на Восток, сдвиг, примером которого является превращение римским императором Константином I греческого города Византия в императорскую резиденцию Константинополь в 330 г. Точно также, как в Римской империи, данный сдвиг наблюдается и в германском мире.

Ключевым памятником для изучения этих изменений является могильник Варпелев в восточной Зеландии, традиционно датируемый фазой C2 (250/60–310/20 гг.). С одной стороны, инвентарь двух погребений этого могильника указывает на близкую связь с германским центром власти в Химлингёе, основанным в середине II в. С другой стороны, погребальный ин-

вентарь обозначает связи с германской военной знатью, поскольку он представлен в погребениях IV – V вв.

Могильник Варпелев сам по себе является примером перехода от римского к германскому времени, но в то же время проявляет и связь с поздней античностью в доисторической части Европы.

Могильник Варпелев расположен на полуострове Стивнс на восточном побережье Зеландии. Его открыл в 1876 г. некий крестьянин, копавший землю в поисках гравия. Раскопки велись в 1876–1877 гг., а результаты их были незамедлительно опубликованы в журнале «*Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie*» (Engelhardt 1877). Благодаря близости

этого памятника к богатым некрополям знати в Химлингее и Валлэбю, от которых его отделяют всего несколько километров, его считают частью восточнозеландского центра власти позднеримского времени. Могильнику Химленгее посвящено подробное исследование У. Лунн-Хансен, изданное в 1995 г. (Lund Hansen et al. 1995). После публикации могильника Варпелев в 1877 г. никого особенно не интересовал памятник в целом, тогда как отдельные предметы и группы предметов привлекали определённое внимание на протяжении многих лет, становясь объектом различных анализов и исследований. Основываясь на этих работах, могилы, а по ним и погребальный памятник в целом, датируют периодом C2.

Тем не менее, новые исследования показывают, что период существования данного могильника вполне мог растянуться ещё на несколько поколений.

Могильник состоял из 28 могил по обряду трупоположения, причём четыре погребения выполнены по более сложному обряду. Умерших укладывали на спине, головой на юг, что, как мы знаем, обычно для погребений знати римского времени. Прочих<sup>1</sup> погребённых, насколько можно судить, укладывали в скорченном положении на боку, головой на север. В двух из четырёх особых могил находился богатый инвентарь, включавший римские импорты, а также изделия из золота и серебра (погребения *a* и «альфа» — рис. 1–2), тогда как в двух других найдены немногочисленные обычные вещи, например, костяной гребень и бронзовая фибула. Вероятнее всего, последние являются самыми ранними погребениями на памятнике, тогда как богатые могилы относятся к следующему поколению или поколениям.

Самым поздним является погребение *a* (рис. 1). Это самое богатое из всех погребений знати этого времени в Скандинавии. Находки включают римские сосуды — шесть стеклянных и один бронзовый, наручный браслет, два перстня и булавку из золота, денарий императора Проба (282–286 гг.), пояс с серебряными украшениями позднеримского типа, сигнальный рог с серебряными оковками, деревянное ведро с бронзовыми оковками, костяные гребень и игральные фишки, четыре медвежьих

когтя и керамический кувшин.

В статье основное внимание уделено римским вещам. Четыре из шести сосудов уникальны, один принадлежит к довольно обычному типу 230 по Х.-Ю. Эггерсу, а ещё один утрачен. Наиболее знаменит канфар из синего стекла, изготовленный в технике выдувания, в ажурной серебряной оправе. Некоторые из этих сосудов указывают на восточную часть Римской империи. Также интересны серебряная пряжка и накладки на пояс. Тип пряжки, очевидно, римский, но её детали указывают на германское влияние. Пояс находит не так много близких параллелей — фактически, есть только две действительно похожие на него находки. Первая из них — небольшая пряжка из могильника Спантов в Румынии, который относится к черняховской культуре (культуре Синтана-де-Муреш). Вторая — группа пряжек и накладок из одной из могил некрополя римского городка Карс, ныне Харсова, также в Румынии. На близость ремня из Карса к нашей находке указывает сходство индивидуальных деталей, а не пряжек в целом, которые на самом деле не так и похожи. Могила в Карсе условно датируется 320 г. Подобная датировка погребения *a* поставит его в рамки перехода от периода C2 к C3.

Из анализа могильника Варпелев и его погребального инвентаря в сравнении с содержимым ранних могил знати в Химлингее и на других выдающихся памятниках Севера становится ясно, что вещи из могил в Варпелеве указывают на более тесные контакты с римлянами, чем ранние погребения.

Если обратиться к истории Римской империи от кризиса середины III в. до периода Константина I, то становится очевидно, что менявшаяся политическая ситуация в западных провинциях должна была оказать существенное влияние на все германские племена, взаимодействовавшие с римлянами. Любые модели контактов, которые могли происходить до кризиса, должны были пересматриваться в новых условиях. Что же касается центра власти в восточной Зеландии, желание поддерживать богатый уровень жизни, как раньше, потребовало бы от знатных семейств гораздо более активных действий, отражением которых могли быть погребения *a* и «альфа» в могильнике Варпелев.

Vest-Agder County Council

V. I. Vernadsky National Taurida University

“Heritage of Millennia” Non-Profitable Foundation for History and Archaeology

## **INTER AMBO MARIA**

# **Northern Barbarians from Scandinavia towards the Black Sea**

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